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Headquarters of the Soviet Union's KGB is Lubyanka in downtown Moscow.

How the KGB Keeps Its Iron Grip on Soviet Life

The secret police are known for espionage abroad. But it is at home that their ominous shadow is feared by everyone.

MOSCOW

Leaders may come and leaders may go in the Soviet Union, but there is one all-important force that retains its power no matter who runs the Kremlin—the KGB.

In the United States, the Central Intelligence Agency is under strict orders to concentrate only on intelligence operations overseas and to keep its hands off undercover work at home.

In the Soviet Union, however, the KGB spreads its shadow across the entire spectrum of Soviet life, combining the functions of the CIA, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Coast Guard, Border Patrol and Secret Service.

A continuing reality. That is a fact of Soviet life that Mikhail Gorbachev would be unable to change—even if he wanted to.

The KGB—officially the Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti, or Committee for State Security—is familiar to foreigners as Moscow's espionage arm

abroad, the secret agency that spies against friend and foe alike.

Virtually unknown outside the Soviet Union is the iron grip it holds on the Soviet people. Here, the KGB is described with such words as ruthless, pervasive, cunning.

Today, more than 67 years after the world's first so-called workers' state was founded, the KGB is as vital as ever to continuation of Kremlin power.

"The KGB is everywhere," says one Muscovite. "That means we always are looking over our shoulders. We cannot trust one another. When will a leader come forward who will do away with these internal espionage activities?"

Western experts here in the Soviet capital provide this partial profile of the massive, shadowy organization:

■ The KGB now employs a nationwide staff of 90,000 officers supported by 150,000 technicians and clerical work-

ers. It controls 250,000 border guards equipped with tanks, helicopters and armored vehicles.

■ At home, the responsibilities of the KGB include counterespionage, cracking down on political opposition, ferreting out dissidents, guarding headquarters of the Communist Party, probing crimes such as treason and monitoring political views inside the armed forces. It also runs a prison system, safeguards nuclear-weapons storage dumps and investigates all Soviet citizens before they leave the country.

■ Abroad, the KGB is reputed to employ 2,500 agents—at least 500 in the United States. Their task is to infiltrate government agencies, acquire official documents and advanced technology and recruit citizens to serve Moscow.

■ The KGB's annual budget, depending on what items are included, is put at between 6 billion and 12 billion dollars out of a national budget of 425 billion. By comparison, 3.2 billion dollars is spent each year to run the government bureaucracy and the judicial system.

Despite its vast size and wide-ranging roles, the KGB is subordinate in more than name to the Communist Party. Much of its activity is controlled by the party Central Committee. And from time to time, it is supervised directly by the ruling Politburo.

Renewal of strength. All indications are, however, that the KGB's stature and independence have grown sharply since Nikita Khrushchev abruptly pared its influence in the 1950s after the death of Joseph Stalin.

Over the past 20 years, the number of KGB officials on the Central Committee has increased fourfold. Yuri Andropov—head of the KGB from 1967 to 1982—dramatized this resurgence when he brought the organization into the inner sanctums of the Kremlin after taking over from Leonid Brezhnev in 1982.

The KGB's impact within the Politburo may have waned slightly since Andropov died in 1984. But it remains a highly potent force. Headquar-



Viktor Chebrikov of KGB

Continued



tered in a nine-story building known as Lubyanka in downtown Moscow, the KGB today is run by Viktor Chebrikov, an Andropov protégé who has the party rank of candidate (nonvoting) member of the Politburo.

Balding and bespectacled, the 61-year-old Chebrikov wears civilian clothes and seems more a cautious bureaucrat than a police chief. But this bland exterior masks a single-mindedness that easily rationalizes use of force.

But the modern KGB does not dwell upon its bloodstained past and its use of coercion. Instead, under Chebrikov, it has gone out of its way to cultivate a more moderate image.

One public sign of this effort occurred last summer when Soviet television broadcast a 10-part series showing KGB officers as tough but fair, intelligent and well educated in uncovering an American spy. People questioned by the KGB confirm that agents are polite—at least in initial contacts.

Gains from ploys. To a certain extent, analysts here say, such efforts are paying off. Helped by substantial perquisites, the KGB is reportedly flooded with job applications. Though fears remain, most Soviets no longer worry about a predawn knock on the door. From time to time, youths even dare to defy the KGB's authority.

Despite its dubious past and public resentment over the ability of secret-police agents to escape punishment for serious crimes, the amount of cooperation citizens voluntarily give the KGB is striking. Soviets employed by foreigners, for instance, routinely report on their bosses to the KGB. So do guides who accompany foreign tourists around the Soviet Union and scientists returning from trips abroad.

It is not only foreigners who are the target of such surveillance. By one Western estimate, as many as 1 in 3 Soviet citizens is an occasional police informer against other citizens. Very little is too trivial for the KGB.

When voluntary help is refused, the KGB uses still stronger medicine. "A usual method is to threaten you with a criminal action on some grounds or other," one Russian explains. "That often has the desired effect."

If this fails, the KGB resorts to other ploys: The use of mind-bending drugs, illegal searches, planting evidence or even outright violence. In 1980, Andrei Sakharov, the leading Soviet dissident, was arrested by the KGB on his way to work and sent into internal exile. No legal charges ever have been brought against him.

Occasionally, the KGB tries to turn an interrogation into a recruitment. One would-be Jewish emigrant recalls how the secret police offered to help him leave the country in return for reports on activities of former Soviet citizens living in the United States. When he refused, he was told: "You are not a true Soviet person and cannot be trusted. We must inform your institute director."

Conscious of the odds against them, Soviet citizens often prepare themselves in advance for encounters with the KGB.

One dissident even produced a manual on how to stand up to questioning. He was arrested and convicted of "anti-Soviet activities."

As such vignettes show, the KGB has a virtual free hand within the Soviet Union. Reinforcing its power is an octopuslike structure that stretches into all 15 Soviet republics, every city, ev-

ery government ministry, every institute, military unit and workplace.

"You've got to realize that even a chief doctor in a hospital probably has a KGB connection," says an elderly Muscovite who suffered under Stalin.

Just how deeply such wariness is ingrained here is underlined by a piece of Moscow folk wisdom. Dial 7 or 115, the saying goes, and if you hear rapid beeps, your telephone is bugged. Even today, when sensitive subjects are discussed indoors, Muscovites unplug their phones and play loud music.

The feeling of being under constant surveillance has political impact, too. "Knowing silent ears and eyes are watching has a remarkably sobering effect at high levels," notes a Westerner. "It contributes a lot to the prevailing conservatism and do-nothingness."

A rise in stock. Boosting the KGB's importance to the Kremlin has been its success over the past seven years in confronting and crushing the Soviet dissident movement.

Starting in the late 1970s—with a request to the Politburo by Andropov when he was chief of the secret police for permission to seize up to 2,000 persons—the KGB has arrested or silenced almost the entire human-rights community in this country.

Hand in hand with this crackdown has gone a drastic KGB-directed assault on emigration. In 1979, 51,320 Jews and several thousand ethnic Germans and Armenians left the country. Last year, fewer than 1,000 Jews and an even smaller number of Germans and Armenians got out.

Behind this switch is an extreme definition of national security. Explains a Jew who is trying to reach Israel: "If you are a soccer player and compete against a team from a secret institute, you are deemed to have access to secrets and are barred from emigration."

The KGB now is in the middle of a modernization program that is fitting it with sophisticated surveillance equipment, computerized data banks and retrieval systems. This means that its powers will increase even more.

Such a prospect may seem reassuring for a Communist Party that is wary of any criticism, committed to one-party rule and confident of its ability to hold the KGB in check.

But for the Soviet Union's 276 million people, a strengthened KGB means that citizen still will be set against citizen, and the Soviets will continue to reserve their loyalties for trusted friends, not the Communist system.

It is a system that is likely to endure through the era of Mikhail Gorbachev. □

By NICHOLAS DANILOFF